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\$B 269 897

YB 08546



FROM PATRONAGE  
TO PROFICIENCY IN  
THE PUBLIC SERVICE

*An Inquiry into Professional Qualification  
and Methods of Recruitment in  
the Civil Service and the  
Municipal Service*

By

WILLIAM A. ROBSON



*London:*

THE FABIAN SOCIETY  
25, Tothill Street, Westminster, S.W. 1

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PRICE ONE SHILLING



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THIS work has been published at the expense of the  
Tulloch and Barr Publishing Fund, instituted as a  
Memorial of Lieut. WILLIAM TULLOCH and Capt.  
HUGH BARR, M.B., R.A.M.C., two members of the  
Fabian Society who lost their lives in the Great War.

# From Patronage to Proficiency in the Public Service

## PART I. THE NATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE.

**T**HE old saying that the success or failure of all institutions depends on the men who work them is a political platitude of the first water; but it is acquiring a new aspect of truth with the gradual evolution of modern political science from the old "art of government." For with this development success or failure comes to depend not only, as hitherto, on the spirit and character of the men who work the institutions, but also, to an ever-increasing extent, on their expert knowledge and professional qualifications. The progress of this transition is necessarily a slow one, and in our own day we shall see no more than its mere beginning; but still we can note that the most significant characteristic of the progressive development of State activity, public ownership and administrative regulation which has been one of the outstanding political features of the past century, is the alteration in the methods by which the greatly extended functions of government are carried out.

In the old days, the whole sphere of government was in the hand of the amateur. Legislation was mainly the privileged affair of the leading members of a few wealthy landowning families, and administration entrusted to the tender mercies of their usually incompetent and corrupt satellites—younger sons, needy relatives and the lower strata of a nobleman's entourage. Those days are gone, so far as administration is concerned. Gone, too, are the days when the central government relied for its local execution on the benevolent despotism of the propertied Justice of the Peace. Legislation, it is true, and the ultimate executive power, are still in the hands of the amateur; for from our supreme law-makers we have still not learnt to ask for more than tact, a pleasing personality, the ability to compromise,

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the gift of plausible speech, personal integrity and a blameless married life. But behind this amiable amateur there is now the support of a large body of highly-trained professional administrators: the Civil Service. So far as the day-to-day administration of the central authority is concerned, government is virtually no longer in the hands of the amateur, but is the business of a corps of state employees whose work is becoming increasingly expert in its nature, and increasingly scientific in its method. Scientific, that is to say, because it tends more and more to be expressed in quantitative rather than in qualitative terms; to be based on the statistical measurement of social phenomena rather than on the casual speculation of ignorance; to be subdivided and specialized, and to be investigated by the usual inductive methods of science.

This work requires for its performance something more than the good nature, easy manners and virtuous character which our ancestors demanded, in theory at least, from their public officials; and which the present generation still seeks largely in its Conservative and Liberal Members of Parliament. It requires, in fact, *expertise*. It requires an expert knowledge of the technique of administration not merely because the work of government has grown largely in scale, but also (and chiefly) because it has become so much more complicated and intricate that it has to be carried out to a considerable extent by specialists—using that word in its widest meaning. We shall examine later on the methods by which the National Civil Service recruits into its ranks the skilled workers which it needs in order to carry out its functions, and our inquiry will be carried on with a view to comparing those methods with the ones employed for a similar purpose by another great public service—the Municipal Civil Service.

By the Municipal Civil Service we mean that vast corps of administrative and clerical public servants which occupies in relation to the Local Authorities of Great Britain much the same position that the National Civil Service occupies in relation to the Central Government. The elected members of the governing authority, whether Cabinet Ministers or members of the District, Borough or County Council, are usually amateurs in so far as they are for the most part without expert know-



ledge; and in every case it is they, and not the professional administrators in the National or Municipal Civil Service which serves them, who frame the policy and issue the orders of the Authority. But in the local service, as in Whitehall, it is the Municipal Civil Service that carries on the day-to-day administration, advises and influences the Councillors, and is, in the final analysis, obedient to any decision the Council may choose to make. The work which is the business of this skilled local administration is of enormous importance and diversity: it comprises responsibility for roads and lighting, washhouses and baths, gas, water and electric undertakings, the whole system of elementary and secondary education, the police, the running of tramway and motor-bus services, cemeteries, town planning, building and allotments, public health and sanitation in all their multifarious forms, public libraries, hospitals, maternity and child welfare centres, and a thousand and one other matters of a similar nature.

Although it is true that every local authority in the kingdom is ultimately subordinate to the central government, the relationship cannot be perfunctorily dismissed as that of inferior and superior. For some purposes, indeed, the whole government of the country, both central and local, is ranged into a hierarchical system of supervising units, with Whitehall at the top and the humble Parish Meeting at the bottom; but more often the local authority is made a responsible body and is given statutory powers by Parliament, which it is either permitted or compelled to utilize in any way it deems best, taking into account local conditions, for the achievement of the particular end in view. In this way a very great deal of local autonomy and enterprise are brought into play, and the work of the local administration as a whole becomes hardly less complicated, less technical, or less important than that of the central administration. It requires for its performance very nearly as much training, ability, experience and *expertise* as the work of the departments of the Central Government, for what it lacks in scale it makes up in scope. Yet the Municipal Civil Service, upon which it devolves, remains almost unknown to the general public whom it serves with devotion and integrity of purpose. And this in spite of the fact that its functions have been

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rapidly increasing in magnitude for the past quarter of a century. Parliament passes a Housing Act. But who have to build the houses? The House of Commons decides that education after the age of fourteen is not altogether pernicious. But who is to carry out the additional schooling? The answer to these questions, like the answer to a multitude of similar ones, is that the Local Authorities must dispose, to an ever greater extent, of what Parliament proposes.

The object of this paper is to examine the system which provides the Local Councils with the skilled personnel which is necessary for the Municipal Civil Service, and to compare that system with the methods obtaining in the National Civil Service. Let us turn to the latter first.

What do we understand by the National Civil Service? In its widest meaning the term may be taken to denote every person in the employment of the Central Government, including not merely the staffs of the great Departments, but also the Diplomatic and Consular Services, the army of postal servants, the staffs of the museums and public galleries, the personnel of the Law Courts, and a large number of other posts of an equally heterogeneous nature. For our purpose, however, we shall be chiefly concerned with the staffs of the great Departments of State, such as the Home Office, the Treasury, the Board of Trade and so forth; and although from time to time we shall be compelled to refer to many Civil Service appointments which lie beyond these boundaries, we shall nevertheless confine ourselves for the most part to what the general public understands to be the Civil Service.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The exceptional condition of the Service as a result of the war period makes it difficult to give any significant figures of the size of the permanent post-war service. The Royal Commission on the Civil Service, 1912-4, dealt with approximately 60,000 situations (excluding the Post Office and other special branches). This figure was made up as follows:

	Approx.
Temporary or "unestablished" servants (a large number will, in future, rank as permanent officials):	
Clerical ... ..	3,000
Semi-technical ... ..	2,000
Unskilled or subordinate (e.g., messengers, door-keepers, porters, charwomen, etc.) ... ..	20,000
	25,000
Subordinate established servants (e.g., prison warders, office keepers, matrons, etc.)... ..	9,000

Up to 1855, the usual method of appointment to the Service was by patronage, unchecked and uncontrolled; and as a result corruption and inefficiency were rampant. The movement for reform had started, however, in 1833, with a demand by the State for the regulation of appointments in the service of the East India Company overseas. Nevertheless, it had so far failed to touch the Home problem that in 1849 Sir Charles Trevelyan, then the Secretary of the Treasury, wrote that "There is a general tendency to look to the public establishments as a means of securing a maintenance for young men who have no chance of success in the open competition of the legal, medical and mercantile professions. . . . The dregs of all other professions are attracted towards the public service as a secure asylum. . . . The prizes of the profession have long been habitually taken from those to whom they properly belong and have been given to members of the political service. . . . We are involved in a vicious circle. The permanent Civil Servants are habitually superseded because they are inefficient, and they are inefficient because they are habitually superseded."

In order to remedy this degraded state of affairs, Mr. Gladstone appointed Sir Charles Trevelyan and Sir Stafford Northcote to inquire into the general conditions of the Civil Service. Their report appeared in 1853, and

Executive officers (e.g., officers of Customs and Excise, Patent Office Examiners, etc.)	...	...	...	Approx.	9,000
Professional officers (e.g., lawyers, doctors, chemists, architects, surveyors, etc.)	...	...	...		1,500
General, Administrative and Clerical Staff	...	...	...		15,000
Total				...	59,500

Cf. Treasury Return, dated July 27th, 1914. 390 LVI, 1914.

These figures did not, however, include clerical workers in many special branches which can be called "civil offices," but which are not regarded as such in a narrower interpretation of the words "Civil Service." During the war a very large number of temporary employees were engaged. On July 1st, 1919, the number was 173,338, of which 115,061 consisted of women. By January 1st, 1921, it had decreased to 110,517, of which only 51,603 were women. On the same date the total staff employed in Government Departments amounted to 364,460, of whom 253,943 were permanent officials. The Post Office accounted for 209,490 Civil Servants out of the above total, and the Ministries of Food and Munitions for 2,154 and 3,604 respectively. This left a balance of nearly 150,000 to be distributed among the remaining Departments. Cf. Statement showing staffs employed, etc. Cd. 1152. 1920. On October 1st, 1921, the figures were practically the same as on January 1st, 1921. Cf. Cd. 1530, 1921.

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is the foundation upon which the modern Service, as we know it to-day, has been built. "Admission into the Civil Service," ran the report, "is indeed eagerly sought after, but it is for the unambitious, and the indolent or incapable, that it is chiefly desired. Those whose abilities do not warrant an expectation that they will succeed in the open professions, where they must encounter the competition of their contemporaries, and those whom indolence of temperament or physical infirmities unfit for active exertions are placed in the Civil Service, where they may obtain an honourable livelihood with little labour and with no risk." The report recommended in the first place the replacement of patronage by a system of open competition accompanied by a test of age, health and character; and in the second place that a distinction should be drawn between mere routine and the intellectual work of the Service, and officials recruited separately for the two kinds of work. As a result of this report, the Civil Service Commission was brought into being in 1855 for the purpose of ascertaining the knowledge, age, health and character of candidates for the Service, and of providing those who proved satisfactory in these respects with qualifying certificates; but the Order in Council which created the Commission not only laid it down that the scheme of examination should be settled by the Commissioners according to the discretion of the heads of the various Departments, but expressly declared that "such examining Board shall not make any alteration in respect of the nomination or appointment of candidates by those who are or may be charged with the duty of nomination or appointment." In this way, unduly illiterate persons were excluded from the Service by means of the regulation requiring nominees to pass a simple qualifying examination; but at the same time the essential features of the system of patronage were retained. In their first report, however, the Civil Service Commissioners pointed out that competitive examination had been tried in some dozen or so instances—a tiny proportion of the whole—and recommended an extension of the competitive principle. Later, most of the Depart-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Report of Commissioners, 1853, p. 4. Also Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Civil Service, 1912-4, p. 5. Also the Business of Government: III, The Civil Service (Ministry of Reconstruction Pamphlet No. 38).

<sup>2</sup> Order in Council, May 21st, 1855.

ments adopted the system of limited competition, under which three or four candidates would be nominated to compete for each vacancy; and subsequently a preliminary examination was used before entry to the main competition. But all these devices for preserving the spirit of patronage within the form of impartiality were swept away by the Order in Council of 1870, which captured the main stronghold of the advocates of nomination by making open competition obligatory throughout almost the whole province of the Home Civil Service. The passing of the Superannuation Act of 1859, which enacted that, with certain minor exceptions, no Civil Servant should receive a pension unless he possessed a certificate of competency from the Civil Service Commission, had already greatly strengthened the position of that body and of those who wished to extend its power.

Since then, the National Civil Service has received the attention of three Commissions of Inquiry appointed for the purpose. The first of these was the Playfair Committee of 1874. This Committee in its report emphasized the distinction between routine and intellectual work, and recommended, broadly speaking, a greater division of labour and differentiation of function, together with the specialized recruitment of men to correspond to this differentiation. The Lower Division (consisting of "Playfair" Clerks, as they were at first called) owed its development, if not its inception, to the Playfair Report, which originated the plan of having a class of general clerks who should be easily transferable from one office to another, and who should be liable to be posted for service, after admission by open competition, to any office where a vacancy might occur. The method of open competition which it was recommended should be adopted for all classes was as follows: There was, in the first place, to be a competitive written examination, open to all, from which the most successful candidates were to be selected and placed on a list, the number selected in this way being in excess of the vacancies available. The Head of a Department was then to choose his man by personal selection from those on the list; a place on the list being thus no guarantee of employment. Sir Stafford Northcote, who had by then become Chancellor of the Exchequer, instantly saw the dangers to which such a system might be exposed, and

he objected to the proposal on the ground that it would be liable to lead to patronage again. As a result the proposals of the Playfair Committee as to the Lower Division Clerks were accepted, but its recommendations regarding the method of entry were rejected. The second Commission was the Ridley Commission of 1886, which, on the whole, confirmed the general principles laid down by the Playfair Committee. The third and latest Commission was the Royal Commission appointed in 1912, under the chairmanship of Lord MacDonnell, which reported in 1914. The intervention of the war prevented the recommendations of this Commission being put into effect at the time; but they have greatly influenced the reconstruction schemes which are being put forward to enable the Service to recover from the abnormal and inflated position in which it was placed as a result of the war. We shall note the opinions of this Commission in their appropriate contexts.<sup>1</sup>

When we come to regard the Civil Service more closely, we find that it is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous; and there are but few generalizations which can be made of the Service as a whole. Every Civil Servant works, it is true, for a known and fixed remuneration (usually accompanied by annual increments up to a maximum amount), in return for which he has to give his full time service and whole allegiance.<sup>2</sup> Every established Civil Servant is assured (in practice, although not in law),<sup>3</sup> subject to his good behaviour, of permanent

<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, the Civil Service is being reconstructed on a scheme drawn up by the Reorganization Committee of the Civil Service National Whitley Council. This scheme is based partly on the Report and Evidence of the MacDonnell Commission (including the Minority Report by Sir H. Primrose and Mr. A. A. Booth), partly on the recommendations of the Treasury Committee (presided over by Lord Gladstone) on Post-War Recruitment for the Civil Service, partly on original Resolutions of the National Whitley Council itself, and partly on practical considerations such as the presence of a large number of ex-service men engaged on temporary work in the various Departments of State. The full scheme will not be available for some months, but most of the important innovations of principle have already been made public and will be taken into consideration in our survey.

<sup>2</sup> "Permanency of Employment, leading after a prescribed term of years to pension, is and must remain a condition of employment of a large proportion of Government servants. From the commercial point of view such a system might be considered uneconomical, but it is one of the conditions under which the public service has to be carried on."—Fourth Report of C.S. Commission, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> In law a Civil Servant has no security and is liable to instant dismissal by the Crown.

employment for a certain number of years, followed by a pension;<sup>1</sup> and all official employees are restricted in certain ways as to their political freedom. There, however, unity ends and diversity begins; as we shall see by examining the structural organization of the Service more closely.

There is, first of all, the general clerical and administrative class, the outstanding characteristic of which is a division into strictly-defined grades. The members of each are recruited for general service in the grade, and then posted for duty to one or another of a large number of departments employing the particular grade. After allocation to a definite office, however, transference is rare, except in the cases of men of exceptional ability who are transferred to responsible positions. Up to very recently, the chief grades under this heading consisted of Boy Clerks, Assistant Clerks, Second Division Clerks, Intermediate Clerks, and Class I Clerks, but under the new scheme they will be arranged into the following groups: Writing Assistants, Clerical Class (Junior and Senior Grades), Executive Class (Junior and Senior Grades), and Administrative Class.<sup>2</sup>

The principle that has been acted upon in the past for the recruitment of these grades is that entry to each should be by means of a separate open competition corresponding in quality, but not in kind, to the standard of work that a successful candidate would be required to perform. Thus the examination for Boy Clerks, intended to secure the services of lads of about sixteen years of age for routine clerical work, consisted of a series of elementary tests in Handwriting, Orthography, Arithmetic, Composition, Copying, Geography, History, etc., while the examination for Class I Clerks (in future to be called the Administrative Class), who form the highest branch of the Service and to whom falls most of the creative intellectual work of administration, was equal in difficulty to a stiff Honours degree at Oxford or Cambridge, and was, in fact, designed to attract the most promising students from these Universities. The

<sup>1</sup> The pension, again, is given of grace, and may legally be withheld, though in practice this is almost unknown. One important result is, however, that officials leaving the Service before the completion of their service can claim no proportion of their pension.

<sup>2</sup> Members of the Executive Class and Administrative Officers will not, it is understood, be employed simultaneously in the same office.

same principle will, in the future, be adhered to in recruiting men for the new groups referred to above, with the important difference that a Training Grade will be formed inside the Service to enable men and women showing promise of ability, who entered by a low grade, to obtain promotion to the highest positions without having to compete in open competition with external candidates whose good fortune has permitted them to enjoy a University education.<sup>1</sup>

2 We next come to what may be regarded as the Departmental Civil Service. Consideration of this is peculiarly difficult because, in the first place, it is impossible to discover upon what principle in regard to work the authorities have acted in deciding that a Department shall have a staff especially recruited rather than a staff drawn from one of the general classes; and in the second place, because it includes every kind of employee, in classes varying in size from more than 10,000 members to fewer than a dozen.

Thus in this category come appointments in a particular Department for work that is of precisely the same nature as that done in a dozen other public offices, as well as appointments for work of a special nature peculiar to a single Department, such as officers of Customs and Excise, the staff of the Taxes Department, Examiners in the Patent Office, Cartographers in the Hydrographic Section of the Admiralty, Draughtsmen in the Survey Branch of the Board of Agriculture, and a large number of other situations, numbering some thirty thousand, for which specialized qualifications are required. Practically all these appointments are filled by open competition: in the latter case by examinations of a special character, and in the former case by examinations that frequently differ hardly at all from those used to recruit officials for analogous general classes. In some cases a restriction is imposed on free entry to the extent that evidence of technical knowledge is required before permission to compete is granted; but this cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Report of Civil Service National Whitley Council on Organization, etc., of the Civil Service, Feb. 17th, 1920. Also Final Report of the Reorganization Committee of the same Whitley Council, Jan. 28th, 1921. Members of the Junior Executive Class (or even of the Junior Clerical Class) may become Administrative Cadets on probation; and members of the Clerical Class may, during their early years, become Executive Trainees, if they show promise of outstanding ability.



regarded as a serious limitation to the principle of open competition.

A third large group of situations in the public service is that which consists of comparatively unskilled manual, or semi-manual, workers such as Messengers, Royal Park Keepers, Prison Warders, Established Postmen, Attendants in State Lunatic Asylums, etc. These are filled by means of nomination followed by a simple qualifying examination in elementary subjects such as reading, writing and arithmetic. In several cases a successful candidate may be allocated to any one of a number of establishments employing the grade in which he has been placed. Nomination usually rests with the head of the Department concerned. We are already passing from the clear light of open competition to the shadow of patronage. This group forms one of the intermediate stages. 3

Another group which it is possible to distinguish is that which may be termed the Professional Civil Service. The word "Professional" is used here in the ordinary civilian sense, and is meant to denote the various qualified practitioners, such as doctors, architects, analytical and research chemists, lawyers, educationalists, anthropologists, Egyptologists and other professional experts whose work is largely of an advisory or supervisory nature. These men are usually taken into the service on the strength of their professional eminence, and at a more advanced age than other officials. They are rarely examined, but are usually nominated by the Head of the Department concerned and certificated by the Civil Service Commissioners on the evidence of their professional qualifications.<sup>1</sup> They number between 1,200 and 1,500. 4

These main groups into which we have attempted to classify Civil Servants according either to the nature of their work or to the method by which they are recruited, must not be regarded as rigidly definitive. It is, in fact, impossible to discover any exact correspondence between the various groups and the various methods of recruitment: all the way through there are exceptions, overlappings, anomalies. Nor have we by any means exhausted all the classes of appointments offered by the

<sup>1</sup> This is permitted under Clause VII of the Order in Council of Jan. 1st, 1910.

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Service. There are, for example, some 250 persons, serving in about forty different grades of situation, who receive their appointments direct from the Crown, either by Letters Patent, Royal Warrant or Order in Council; and these include not only ceremonial and Parliamentary officials, but such important individuals as the permanent heads of the great Departments of State, members of the great Boards of Commission, Inspectors of Schools and the chief officers of the Metropolitan Police. There are, again, important directing posts which are filled by single nomination followed by a qualifying examination; and appointments, as for instance those under Foreign Office control, which, though nominally filled by limited competition, are still really only open to those who can obtain a "patronage nomination," as distinct from the "qualification nomination," which alone is necessary in the case of those posts requiring special professional or technical knowledge<sup>1</sup> to which we have already referred. There are also certain establishments, such as the Employment Exchanges (now under the Ministry of Labour), the staff for which has hitherto been obtained in an entirely unorthodox way, so far as Civil Service procedure is concerned. When the Labour Exchanges were originally set up, the First Civil Service Commissioner, at the invitation of the President of the Board of Trade, acted as Chairman of two committees, whose functions were to interview, select, and recommend suitable men and women for appointment to vacancies which had previously been advertised in the public press. Many of the administrative posts were filled by the Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade on the recommendation of the Director or General Manager acting alone. But an even more remarkable method is that adopted in regard to the staff of Solicitors to Public Departments. An allowance is made to the solicitor for the provision of his staff; and there is no regulation or control exercised over him either as to the manner of their appointment or in regard to their remuneration and conditions of service. They are not, in fact, Civil Servants at all in the technical sense of the term, and do not rank as such.

<sup>1</sup> Abstract of Rules and Regulations respecting Examinations for the Home Civil Service, issued by the Civil Service Commission, 1919; also *Civil Service Year Book*, 1915.]

They are not regarded even as temporary or unestablished Civil Servants, for the very reason that their pay and conditions of service are not subject to Treasury sanction and Parliamentary control; and because they do not join the Service by any one of the recognized channels of entry. For although there is the great diversity which we have already noticed in the methods adopted by the Service in keeping its ranks supplied with recruits of every grade, these methods are, in spite of their variety, fairly well-defined and to some extent recognizable. They are as follows :—

1. Nomination, without examination, to offices held directly from the Crown. That is, by Letters Patent, Royal Warrant, or Order in Council.
2. Nomination, without examination, to offices declared to be "professional" (under the provisions of Clause VII or Schedule B of the Order in Council, January 10, 1910)<sup>1</sup> and for which professional qualifications are accepted in lieu of a Civil Service Examination.
3. Nomination, with qualifying examination, to situations of a subordinate semi-manual nature in prisons, asylums, etc.
4. Limited competitive examinations for appointments requiring nomination in the first-place. For some of these situations nomination is based on pure patronage; in others it is merely restricted to candidates who can produce evidence of already possessing special professional or technical qualifications. It not infrequently occurs that the number of nominees does not exceed the number of vacancies available in the particular grade of the service, and the competitive element is then eliminated.
5. Open competitive examination for all the general clerical and administrative classes, and for a great many other grades. The entry to these examinations is unrestricted, and candidates are selected according to the marks they obtain for their written work.

It can be seen, then, that "while open competition regulates appointment to the administrative and clerical

<sup>1</sup> Appointments "in the customary course of promotion, by persons previously serving in the same Department," are a special class of "Nomination without examination." They should really be classified as "Nomination, without *further* examination."

classes of the Civil Service, and also to large and important groups of departmental situations, limited competitive examination controls recruitment for certain other classes of such situations important in character though not numerous, and qualifying examination, into which the competitive principle does not enter, gives access to a very large number of subordinate situations; while even uncontrolled patronage continues to fill some of the highest departmental offices, as well as the lowest situations."<sup>1</sup>

Turning now to the actual tests and the conditions under which they are imposed, the most striking feature of the whole system is that these examinations are one and all carried out by an impartial tribunal having but the slenderest connection with the Departments for which it recruits personnel. This tribunal is the Civil Service Commission, which is controlled by "His Majesty's Civil Service Commissioners." The work of the Commission is impressively large. The Commissioners have annually to test the knowledge of some tens of thousands of candidates by means of hundreds of separate examinations,<sup>2</sup> which vary in kind<sup>3</sup> from the simple test in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Composition for a Matronship at the Royal College of Arts to the advanced examination in English, Mathematics, Geology, Chemistry, Physics and Metallurgical Law for an Inspectorship of Mines and Quarries; from the elementary papers in Geography, Digesting, etc., set before a prospective Trinity House Extra Clerk to the elaborate syllabus in some thirty-eight advanced subjects (including, for example, Arabic, Sanskrit, Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy and Ancient Roman History) which is undertaken by candidates for Administrative Clerkships; and in addition to this it is the duty of the Commissioners to ensure

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Report of Royal Commission on Civil Service, 1914, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> The Sixty-fourth Report of the C.S. Commissioners (1920) stated that during the preceding year the Commission had dealt with 51,193 cases, of which 30,175 were candidates in open competitions, 5,389 candidates nominated to compete, and 15,629 nominated singly (out of the 51,193 some 7,965 referred to the Indian, Military, Naval or Colonial Services).

<sup>3</sup> At the time of making their Report in 1914, the Royal Commission on the C.S. stated that there were forty tests for open competition, by which method 20,000 serving Civil Servants had been recruited, eighty tests for limited competition to fill some 2,000 situations, besides 130 qualifying examinations giving access to some 8,500 situations. These figures are approximate.

that candidates comply with prescribed conditions of fitness in regard to age, health, nationality and character. All this work is carried on in the light of considerable publicity. Specimen examination papers and tabulated lists showing the names and marks obtained by each entrant are published for all competitive examinations; and an Annual Report contains much interesting information in statistical form.

We have now had slightly over half-a-century's experience of open competition as a method of recruiting the Civil Service, and are therefore able to envisage its practical results to some considerable extent. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this complicated system of public examination as a means of recruitment?

The method of open competitive examination<sup>1</sup> is sound, democratic and equitable in that it treats all comers alike, regardless of distinctions of wealth and social rank, in that it judges men and women impersonally by their ability to carry out a specific performance, and in that it selects individuals, without reference to their family connections and inherited fortune, by the common rule of a prescribed test under known conditions. But above all, it is an effective method of ensuring that no one shall enter any grade in the Service without having attained at least to the minimum standard of general education or of technical knowledge, as the case may be, which it is desirable the members of that grade should possess, and without being capable of performing six hours of concentrated mental work in a day. Such a regulation of the minimum standard of knowledge and capacity for work must be the first essential of an expert and efficient Administration; and outweighs, in our opinion, all the disadvantages which the method involves, and which we shall now proceed to discuss.

The defects of the Civil Service examination system are many. Most of them, being due merely to lack of imagination and foresight on the part of those who designed the tests, are temporary and incidental, and are therefore capable of correction. The age limits, for example, have often been fixed without reference to the educational development of young persons attending

<sup>1</sup> Or quasi-open competition, such as examinations restricted to those who can give evidence of special qualifications.

school or college at like ages;<sup>1</sup> the future career of both the successful and the unsuccessful candidate has often been completely ignored;<sup>2</sup> and in general the Civil Service Commission has not seriously attempted to correlate its various examinations with corresponding stages in the educational system of the nation. But these and similar flaws can easily be remedied.

What cannot be easily remedied are certain defects inherent in the very nature of the modern literary examination. Most of the Civil Service examinations consist of written work throughout; and the test is inevitably highly artificial. The examination takes place in a strange room, where the candidate is not likely to feel at home; and it catches him at an abnormal moment when he is frequently in a condition of high nervous tension and mental inhibition because he feels that his whole career depends on the result of the next few hours. We think that only a person very ignorant of human nature and of modern psychological and physiological research would assert that the man who shines most during a critical, highly-concentrated period such as this will necessarily, or even probably, be capable of doing better work under normal conditions than his more highly nervous comrade who cannot come up to the scratch when his mental equipment is thrown out of gear by special circumstances which will not again recur.<sup>3</sup> It is common knowledge that many of the most able, gifted and industrious students at schools and colleges are "no good at examinations"; and public opinion shows some recognition of the truth underlying this phenomenon by its steady refusal to be impressed by individuals whose success lies (sometimes exclusively) in heading the lists of examinees.

The Civil Service examination system gives an enormously preponderating chance of success to the candidate who possesses the ability to answer rapidly a

<sup>1</sup> See Fourth Report of Royal Commission on the C.S., p. 34, for special reference to age of recruitment for Second Division Clerks.

<sup>2</sup> Boy Clerks, for example, were recruited by open competitive examinations between age limits of 15 and 16, and discharged after two or three years' employment, unless they obtained, as few of them were able to do, permanent employment by success at further examinations. This was a very bad and callous case of "blind alley" employment. The enrolment of Boy Clerks has now been discontinued. Cf. Fourth Report of Royal Commission on C.S., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> For the views on the subject of examinations of an eminent educationist, cf. *The Student's Guide*, by J. Adams, Professor of Education in the University of London, p. 273 *et seq.*

number of unpremeditated questions in two or three hours. This encyclopædic power of mind is useful in certain connections, but it is not necessarily attached to the type of intellect which is of most value even for day-to-day administrative or executive work. On the other hand, a successful examinee is usually equipped with an *efficient* mentality and possessed of the power of concentrating easily on to any given subject at will<sup>1</sup>; and these faculties are definitely of great advantage for administrative work. But it does not follow that their possessor is a deep or original thinker. It may well be, however, that it is the efficient intellect which is of most value to the Service; but even so, we must note that competitive written examinations are selective of relative types rather than criteria of absolute intellectual ability. This is true of qualifying examinations to a far less extent.

The greatest defect in the system of written examinations is, however, the fact that it can at most test but a single aspect of an individual's general capacity as a potential Civil Servant. Of his character and powers of endurance, of his address and resourcefulness, of his general demeanour and discretion, of his moral courage and loyalty, of his honesty of purpose and tactfulness, of his powers of co-operation and of creative invention, above all of his quality of mind and outlook—of these vitally important elements the written paper takes no account<sup>2</sup>; and although the Civil Service Commission may attempt to fill in the gaps by obtaining evidence of character, any system which leaves so much to chance must be regarded as gravely imperfect. This has been particularly noticeable in regard to the recruitment of Class I (now termed Administrative) Clerks, who are required to do practically all of the creative intellectual work of the Service. A large number of professors and tutors from the Universities gave evidence before the last Royal Commission on this point. The suitability of the then existing syllabus was not unanimously agreed

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Our Social Heritage*, by Graham Wallas, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> This is well brought out by Graham Wallas in *The Great Society*, p. 356: "A man who has to inspect the work of five hundred, or even a hundred, others must do so superficially. He knows nothing of the life and character of the man before him, and must judge by unimportant or accidental details observed at the moment of inspection. . . . Under such conditions, as a school teacher complained to me, 'only the more obvious forms of success pay.'"

to, but competitive written examination was supported as the most practicable means of selection. Frequent insistence was made on the failure of such a test to show not merely knowledge, but capacity—sound judgment, common sense, resourcefulness and resolution.<sup>1</sup> The problem was so important and difficult of solution that the Royal Commission did not venture to make recommendations, but merely made suggestions for a future committee to consider.

The Civil Service Commission—the examining body—had also dimly apprehended that all was not well with their method of recruiting the State's most trusted administrators, and had tried to work in the "general-quality-of-mind" element in some measure by making the examination "a test of general education rather than of specialized ability";<sup>2</sup> but this was becoming difficult, owing to the tendency at the Universities towards specialized faculties; for undergraduates naturally wanted to specialize in case they failed to obtain a position in the Civil Service and had to seek a career in one of the professions or in industry. In fact, it had "become more and more difficult to adapt the test to the conditions of modern higher education";<sup>3</sup> for the Civil Service Commission was wedded to the idea that "general education" consisted largely, if not exclusively, of that absorption in Greek verse and Latin prose which is the basis of the Honour Moderations examination at Oxford. And although the Commissioners had endeavoured to meet the demand of the trend of modern education by wildly "adding subject after subject to their list" (until there were thirty-eight in all), they continued to allocate an enormous preponderance of marks to classical studies, partly because "the difficulties of equating with each other classical studies, modern literary studies, mathematical studies, scientific studies . . . are beyond question very great,"<sup>4</sup> but chiefly because they honestly wanted to bring out the elements of character and capacity and quality of mind, rather than to discover the

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Report of Royal Commission on C.S., pp. 40-1.

<sup>2</sup> Interim Report on Scholarships of Consultative Committee of Board of Education, May, 1916. Quoted in Report of Treasury Committee on C.S., Class I Examination. Cd. 8657. 1917. p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Civil Service Commissioners to Treasury, July 25th, 1916. See Report of Committee on C.S., Class I Exam. Cd. 8657. 1917. p. 8.



mere knowledge of the candidates, and they thought that a test in classics would do this most satisfactorily.

An Advisory Committee of the Board of Education agreed that the examination "should be a test of training as well as of knowledge," and had the good sense to say explicitly that while studies in all subjects were valuable, they "require to be supplemented by training in the use of words, and by knowledge of the institutions, the thoughts and the life of men. . . ." They further suggested a *viva voce* examination as an additional test; and this suggestion was seized upon and vigorously recommended by the special Treasury Committee which was set up to consider the Class I Examination Scheme. "The Viva Voce," ran their report, "should be a test by means of questions and conversation on matters of general interest, of the candidate's alertness, intelligence, and intellectual outlook, his personal qualities of mind and mental equipment."<sup>1</sup> Under the new scheme for this examination, the suggestion has been adopted, and a *viva voce* test of a general nature accounts for one-sixth of the maximum possible marks.<sup>2</sup> This constitutes an important advance upon the previous practice; but it appears that at present the manner in which the *viva voce* examination is conducted leaves much to be desired.

We have dealt at some length with the difficulties arising in regard to the recruitment by open literary examination of the highest grade of the Civil Service, because they are more acute at the extreme end of the scale; but the same problems exist in some degree throughout the whole system, and no honest investigator could afford to ignore them. We do not, however, think that either its inherent defects or its incidental shortcomings invalidate the claim of the open (or quasi-open) Competitive Examination System to be considered by far the most satisfactory method of recruiting officials

<sup>1</sup> Interim Report on Scholarships of Consultative Committee of Board of Education. Quoted in Report of Treasury Committee, Cd. 8657. 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Committee on C.S., Class I Examination, Cd. 8657. 1917. p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Regulations respecting Open Competitive Examination for situations in the Junior Grade of the Administrative Class (Men). Another important alteration has been the placing of important modern subjects, such as Economics, Political Science, International Law and Relations, Psychology, Anthropology, etc., on something approaching an equality with Classics, History and Languages.

for the National Civil Service which has been devised to meet existing conditions. For when all is said and done it has provided the nation with a body of highly-trained, competent, honest, conscientious, hard-working men and women; and if, as it is sometimes suggested, we are inclined to take this fortunate result too much for granted (and especially the remarkable incorruptibility of the English Civil Servant), then a glance at other lands should enable us to appreciate how much we owe to the method of examination for the progressive elimination from our administrative machine of the element of uncontrolled patronage which it has achieved. The process of elimination has been in progress for over half-a-century, and it is still going on. Each of the three great Commissions on the Civil Service has strongly supported the competitive principle; and we do not think it is possible, after a review of the facts, to disagree fundamentally with the following testimony from the Majority Report of the last Royal Commission: "With the progress of this development the Civil Service has grown until at the present time the State possesses a body of public officers who are far more competent and zealous than their predecessors, appointed under the régime of patronage, are stated on official authority to have been. We have no doubt whatever that to this highly satisfactory result the system of competitive examination has mainly contributed. The system has, in our opinion, entirely justified the expectations of its originators. It is true that it never has been, and is not now, exempt from hostile criticism, and we do not affirm that the written examination is an infallible or a final test of the best results of education. But . . . the advantages of the system of competitive examination as a means of recruitment for the Civil Service far outweigh any defects which have come to our notice, and we are convinced of the importance not only of adhering to the system, but of extending it wherever possible."<sup>1</sup>

The progressive extension of the system to those realms of the Service where it does not already apply is almost inevitable; for the principle of competitive examination, whether entirely open or open to all possessing

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on C.S., p. 31.

special technical qualifications,<sup>1</sup> is supported unanimously, not only by all the Commissions and Committees which have considered the subject, but also by the Service itself, speaking through the Civil Service National Whitley Council, which strongly supported the principle of open competitive examination in putting forward its Reorganization Scheme.<sup>2</sup> Almost all the various Associations of Civil Servants, of which there are considerably more than a hundred, have also at one time or another expressed their objection to any form of patronage. The typical view of these multifarious associations was expressed by the Civil Service Alliance (comprising ten allied organizations of the Service, and now merged in the Civil Service Confederation) as follows: "The Alliance is opposed to patronage in all forms, whether by way of such limitations of candidature as depend on personal selection, or of definite appointments of individuals, by ministers or officials."<sup>3</sup>

The case for Competitive Examination is made stronger by a comparison with the possible alternatives that are presented. The most obvious of these is a continuation and extension of the method which, though dwindling, still persists in the Service: namely, nomination by way of patronage, followed possibly by a qualifying examination. But all experience shows that it is impossible to prevent patronage becoming associated with corruption and inefficiency, at any rate unless made subject to a minimum of qualifying competence;

<sup>1</sup> This restriction of entry to a competition to those possessing certain professional qualifications is, as we have suggested previously, a legitimate restriction which does not interfere with the principle involved. The problem presented by the necessity or desirability of recruiting by equitable methods experts who have passed the age at which they are "examinable" for some of the higher professional or technical posts in the Service, is a difficult but not insoluble one. The Royal Commission recommended that (1) Vacancies for such positions should be advertised publicly; (2) Selection in the first instance should be by a Committee composed of officials of the Department concerned together with representatives of the Civil Service Commission; (3) Submission by this Committee of the names of two or three suitable candidates to the Minister in charge of the Department; (4) Scrutiny of the age, health, character, knowledge and ability of such persons by the Civil Service Commissioners; (5) The final choice by the Minister to depend on the record of past achievement and personal qualities of the candidates. Fourth Report, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Civil Service National Whitley Council Report of the Joint Committee on the Organization, etc., of the C.S. 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Organization and Policy of Civil Service Alliance with special reference to the Control of the Civil Service.

and even then there exists a considerable margin for the admission of those evils. At best the method is anti-thetic to the fundamental principles of modern democratic ideas—especially so far as the brain-working members of the Service are concerned.

A word must be said here of the scheme recommended by the Gladstone Committee as a temporary method of recruitment for Class I Clerks at the end of the war. "The method of recruitment," the Report ran, "should approach as nearly as possible to open competition. We do not mean competitive *examination*, which would be impossible to carry out with fairness or prospect of successful results, but *competitive* selection. It should be open to any person to compete for selection who possesses certain well-defined *primâ facie* qualifications."<sup>1</sup> After preliminary sifting by the Civil Service Commission, a Selection Board, consisting of three or four persons "well qualified to weigh conflicting interests . . . and to assess correctly and impartially the educational qualifications of the candidates appearing before them,"<sup>2</sup> would then proceed to select candidates according to (a) School Record, (b) University Record, (c) any other evidence tending to prove educational fitness, (d) Army and Navy Record—length of service, promotions, distinctions, etc., (e) the testimony of persons named by a candidate as having had actual experience of his work, (f) any other evidence asked for by the Board, (g) a qualifying examination "intended to test the candidate's power to read, write and think; it should not be an examination in things which the candidate has 'stopped learning,' but rather in things which he ought to have learnt and ought never to have forgotten. It should thus include no 'cram subjects.'"<sup>3</sup>

This scheme relies for its success largely on unofficial personal testimony as to a candidate's suitability; and normally that obtainable under headings (d) and (e) would be non-existent in the case of young entrants to the Service. The consideration of a candidate's School and University record is a desirable thing, but such consideration is useless for purposes of comparison unless it is possible to obtain absolutely impartial and

<sup>1</sup> Third Interim Report of Treasury Committee on Civil Service: Recruitment after War. Cd. 36. 1919. p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

disinterested evidence given by persons having approximately the same standards of value; and as this is inordinately difficult to obtain, we think competitive examination must stand. But the proposal to make the examination a test of the candidate's "power to read, write and think" is entirely admirable, and a similar conception might well be applied to the Competitive Examination.

The other possible alternative is the enrolment of officials by separate Departments by the ordinary commercial method of advertisement and interview—carried out, let us assume, by a Selection Committee as a safeguard against patronage. Even here we are not without evidence on which to base our opinions, for Direct Recruitment by Departments took place on a large scale during the late war, and was introduced as an emergency measure intended to cope with the enormous demand for staff which resulted from the creation of huge new Ministries and the vast expansion of most of the already existing Departments of State. The difficulties of obtaining efficient personnel became so pressing, and the prevailing chaos so dangerous, that a Special Committee, under the Chairmanship of Sir John Bradbury, was set up by the Treasury to investigate into the state of affairs. The reports of this Committee are illuminating.

Some of the Departments (and the new Ministries especially) stated that they liked being able to engage whoever they pleased at, broadly speaking, whatever remuneration they thought fit, chiefly because it enabled the immediate employing official to select personally his subordinate workers for the precise duties which he had in view, instead of being compelled to "fit in" a graded candidate supplied by the impartial, and possibly not equally well-informed judgment of the Civil Service Commission. This argument is important, especially in a period of emergency, when the element of time is of extreme value, and when it may consequently be particularly desirable for the chief of a Department or the head of a Section to be able to engage persons of whose powers, personalities and methods of working he has already some definite knowledge, or of which he has formed a personal estimation. For successful "fitting in" takes time. The argument was, indeed, recognized by the Treasury Committee as important, but only in the

case of special technical officials, and not in the case of the routine and clerical workers, for whom the demand chiefly consisted, and who, the Committee considered, could have been as well or better supplied by the Civil Service Commission.<sup>1</sup> Personal recommendation by an official already employed in the establishment was also put forward in support of Direct Recruitment; but the Committee recommended, after a careful study of the facts, that an independent test by an impartial body was "undoubtedly desirable" in order to ensure that "the standard both of qualifications and of grading is not relaxed on personal grounds."<sup>2</sup> For personal recommendation was found to result not only in inefficient and poorly-trained candidates, some of whom had actually been rejected by the Civil Service Commission, being employed by various Departments; but in many cases a clerk discharged for inefficiency or insubordination from one Department secured prompt employment in another Department, at an equal or even higher rate of pay. A still worse feature of the system was that it led, not merely to the payment by the State of varying remuneration for similar work, but to the stealing of men from one Department by another. The method of Direct Recruitment led to dissatisfaction among the staffs; for even when differences in rates of pay were accompanied by differences in hours and conditions of service, the former were often not justified by the latter. Competition for personnel between Departments must inevitably prove wasteful and costly to the State, fruitful of discontentment within the Civil Service, and disadvantageous to the members of any grade as a whole, despite the fact that some of them may receive higher wages than they would were the competitive element eliminated. The opinion of the Treasury Committee was, in fact, that "Whatever the advantages which direct recruitment may have for individual Departments, the disadvantages from the point of view of the Service as a whole clearly outweigh them."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It may be pointed out that the argument does apply to some extent in times of emergency even to officials required for ordinary administrative work, because here again the needs of various Departments differ. In some cases officials are called upon to deal almost entirely with papers; while in others the work necessitates constant contact with the public, in which case personal qualities are relatively more important.

<sup>2</sup> Interim Report of Treasury Committee on Staffs. Cd. 9074. 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

We think that the arguments which have been summarized above in favour of and against the method of Direct Recruitment, would all apply, in a lesser degree, to the normal conditions of peace; and accordingly we come to the conclusion that the method is one that cannot for a moment stand comparison with the usual system of Open Competitive Examination by an impartial tribunal, which, judged by the results it has rendered and the principles upon which it is based, must be regarded as having, despite all its shortcomings, justified itself to a far higher degree than any other method which has as yet been invented.

Before passing from the National Civil Service to the Municipal Civil Service, a word must be said concerning the large number of voluntary Associations of Civil Servants (of which there are now well over a hundred), because in the Municipal Service the analogous Associations are, as we shall see later, of great importance in regard to the question of recruitment. "To the higher ranks of the Civil Service," wrote Mr. and Mrs. Webb in 1917, "a Professional Association appears undignified, and partaking of insubordination." But this was not the case among the lower ranks of the Service, for "here we have a perfect maze of Associations of every kind and grade . . . passing insensibly from what are clearly Professional Associations into what are equally clearly of the nature of Trade Unions. These societies of Government employees now approach a hundred in number; they range in membership from 45,000 to a few score; they are all of recent growth; all struggling for full official recognition; they are all concerned, almost exclusively, with the conditions of service and with promoting the interests of their own members; and they all fail as yet to give any but the slightest attention to the development of their particular branch of technique or the improvement of their own vocational training." Thus, so recently as the middle of the Great War it was broadly true that, with a few honourable exceptions, such as, for example, the Associations connected with Officers of Customs and Excise, the great mass of Associations of Civil Servants hardly revealed any corporate interest in the encouragement

<sup>1</sup> *New Statesman*: Special Supplement on Professional Associations. By S. and B. Webb. Part II, p. 32. April 28th, 1917.

and development of the study of Public Administration, Political Science, Economics, Local Government, or any of the multitude of special subjects peculiar to specific departments of the Administration, although there was and still is a crying and obvious need for such activity. Of recent years, however, Civil Servants assert that a marked change of attitude is taking place within the Service; and although the tangible evidence of this change is at present not considerable, it appears possible that an awakened interest in the subject-matter of the vocation may be gradually arising among some of the Associations to which we are referring.<sup>1</sup> Time alone will show this.

The indifference of these Associations in the past has in part been due to the effect of strong official discouragement.<sup>2</sup> It has also in part been due, we believe, to the action of the Civil Service Commissioners in remaining rigidly aloof from any contact with such Associations, as representing the rank and file of the Service, in connection with the planning of the educational tests and vocational qualifications which serve as the professional standards of the Service. Even the most severe critic of professionalism could hardly deny that it is at least conceivable that the Civil Service Commission could have greatly stimulated the intellectual activities of these As-

<sup>1</sup> For example, The Society of Civil Servants has commenced to organize a series of lectures by distinguished Civil Servants and others; and has published some of these in book form. Series of lectures on subjects connected with economics and public administration are also being organized by the Whitley Councils in various Departments, such as the Board of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour, Department of Customs and Excise; and subject-associations have been formed by other Departments, e.g., the Economic Society of the Department of Overseas Trade.

An important proposal at present being considered by various Associations of Civil and Municipal Servants respectively is the establishment of an Institute of Public Administration, the purpose of which would be to promote the study of Public Administration in all its branches.

<sup>2</sup> "Discussions among the officials of Government Departments on official work are severely discouraged if not completely forbidden."—*New Statesman*, Special Supplement on Professional Associations, Part II, April 28th, 1917. An example of this is given by Mr. and Mrs. Webb in *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, p. 189: When the Post and Telegraph Clerks' Association attempted to study the methods by which the Post Office could increase its efficiency, and to publish studies on special subjects, the Postmaster-General made it known that any such investigation, with its implied criticism, would be regarded as a breach of official discipline; and steps were taken to prevent the study being proceeded with.



sociations in a manner beneficial to the nation by asking them to submit reports from time to time on questions concerning the educational qualifications of the members of their respective grades, and the relationship between those qualifications and the work required to be done, and matters of a like nature.

We pass now to the administration serving the local authorities, of which we have already made mention, in order that their methods of recruitment may be compared with those obtaining in the National Civil Service.

## PART II. THE MUNICIPAL CIVIL SERVICE.

We have already spoken of the Municipal Civil Service as comprising that great body of men and women which, acting on behalf of the community and at the behest of its popularly elected local councils, carries out the paving, lighting, cleansing and repair of the roads; manages the local baths and washhouses; runs the municipal gas, water, electric and tramway undertakings; maintains an elaborate system of sanitation and public health services, maternity and child welfare centres; assists in the administration of the police and education services; constructs the nation's houses and demolishes its slums; keeps it supplied with books through the public libraries, with pictures through the municipal art galleries, and with music through the municipal popular concerts; and which, in short, supplies the nation with a multitude of services that range from some of the most important essentials of our everyday life to some of the highest requirements of our mental culture. But the term Municipal Civil Service is really as elastic as the phrase National Civil Service; for just as the latter may be taken to include, for example, the army of Law Court officials, Post Office manual operatives, and attendants in the Royal Parks, or confined to denote only the administrative, executive and clerical staffs of the great Departments of the Metropolis, according to the issue involved, so in the same way the Municipal Civil Service may be regarded as including, for some purposes, and excluding for others, the tens of thousands of Corporation workmen who sweep the roads, remove the household garbage, and perform similar tasks of an unskilled

manual nature. For the purpose in hand, we shall take the Municipal Service chiefly to mean the clerical, administrative and professional officers of the various Urban and Rural District Councils, County and Borough Councils; and especially those who devote full time to their work.<sup>1</sup> But even with this proviso, it is impossible to generalize accurately on the conditions under which this vast multitude of public servants is employed; for with a few exceptions there is no standardization of grades; and in regard to pay, pensions, hours of work, promotion, leave of absence and general conditions of service there exists a diversity almost equal to that obtaining in the world of commerce.

In regard to recruitment—the question with which we are here chiefly concerned—there is no uniform system whatever, except in the London County Council,<sup>2</sup> which

<sup>1</sup> Part-time workers are found in all grades of the local administration, but they are nearly all confined to the smaller authorities. Thus, the local solicitor may be retained for one day's work per week as Clerk to the Council by the Rural District Council, and a similar arrangement is often entered into in regard to the Medical Officer. We should not consider these officials as belonging to the Municipal Civil Service proper; but we should include, on the other hand, a clerical worker who divides his time between two or three separate local authorities, no single one of which is able to employ him full time. The case of unpaid members of the administration, such as voluntary Health Visitors, cannot be determined except by specially considering each instance.

<sup>2</sup> The London County Council has an elaborate system of recruitment of its own, in some ways resembling the method obtaining in regard to the clerical and administrative classes of the National Civil Service. Until recently the "classified" staff, corresponding to the "established" grades of the Civil Service, was divided into a Minor and a Major Establishment, these being again subdivided into sections. Entry to the Minor or Major Establishments, which somewhat resembled the First and Second Divisions of the Civil Service, was by separate open competitive examination. Under the new scheme adopted by the L.C.C. there will in future be "recruitment primarily by means of an Examination for admission by competitive examination into one general grade from which promotion would subsequently be obtained by limited competition into the Major Establishment." This is intended to "provide for a constant flow, from the general grade, of men whose fitness for higher duties would be guaranteed by both experience and examination." Entry into the general grade will be, in accordance with previous custom, by a general educational examination; and the examination for *direct* entrants into the Major Establishment will also be based mainly on educational attainments. But under present arrangements only 20 per cent. of the vacancies will be filled in this way; and the remainder, reserved for members of the general grade, will be filled as a result of an examination in subjects peculiar to local government, such as municipal accountancy, estate management, local government law, etc. The Establishment Committee of the L.C.C. recommended that the temporary makeshift of qualifying examinations should be discontinued, and stated that in their opinion "the only safe and fair method of



dation often take the place of public announcement, especially among the smaller and less enlightened authorities. Where patronage exists it is sometimes exercised by the chief of the department, but more often by members of the Council.

Thus in the local administration we have neither the impartial tribunal (in the sense that the Civil Service Commission is impartial), nor the minimum qualifying standards of general education or of technical knowledge and of capacity for concentrated work, nor the element of competitive literary examination, which we found to be such striking features of the system obtaining in the National Civil Service. The method in vogue corresponds, in fact, very closely to that normally used by the larger business firms, with the important difference that the employment of incompetent subordinates as a result of the exercise of patronage is in the case of a business man usually followed by a heavy financial loss, whereas in the case of a public official no such *personal* monetary sacrifice is involved. But there is one very important characteristic which is a distinguishing feature of the Municipal Service.

This characteristic is that in most of the departments of all the larger authorities there is a division of the personnel into a small professional directing group and a large clerical or administrative non-professional subordinate staff. Thus, in the Town Clerk's office, the Town Clerk himself and one or two of his chief assistants will be solicitors or possibly barristers; in the Public Health Department the directing head and his chief assistants will be members of the medical profession; in the Surveyor's Department the official in charge and his first lieutenants will be qualified engineers; while the most responsible work in the Treasurer's Department will be in the hands of Incorporated Accountants. But in addition to their ordinary professional qualifications, these officials<sup>1</sup> will probably also possess additional distinc-

<sup>1</sup> This membership of a vocational association relating specially to the Municipal Service is not confined, as will be seen later on, to the leading officials only, but extends throughout the whole service. The peculiarity special to the members of the "professional" staff is the so-called "Double organization" system, whereby a Medical Officer, for example, "belongs to such a body as the Society of Medical Officers of Health, the Poor Law Medical Officers' Association or the School Medical Officers' Association; but he also votes for members of the General Medical Council, and almost invariably belongs to one or other

tions: the Medical Officer will have the Diploma of Public Health; the Surveyor will be a Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers and of the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers; the Engineer in charge of the gas, water or electrical works (where the office is not combined with that of Surveyor), a member of the Institutes of Gas, Water or Electrical Engineers. Yet neither the professional qualification nor the membership of a professional association is imposed by law; and local authorities are practically free to act as they choose in the matter, with the two exceptions of Medical Officers and Sanitary Inspectors; for the Ministry of Health requires the former to have the D.P.H. and the latter (usually, but not always) to possess the certificate of the Royal Sanitary Institute or of the Sanitary Inspectors' Examination Board.<sup>1</sup>

Acting under the instructions of this small professional directing staff is the rank and file of the Service. The "un-professional" clerical, administrative or operative personnel in each department is in an overwhelming numerical preponderance; but it remains subordinate on account of the virtual impossibility of acquiring, in the absence of leisure and independent means and special opportunities for study, the costly professional qualifications which bar the way to the highest appointments. And yet when we turn to the vocational associations of the members of these subordinate grades, we find that they aim not at removing the professional barriers of the highest classes of the Service, but at instigating fresh barriers in their

of the Medical corporations or associations."—*New Statesman*, Special Supplement on Professional Associations, by S. and B. Webb, Part II, p. 33, April 28th, 1917.

<sup>1</sup> Under the Public Health Act, 1875, Sec. 191, anyone other than "a legally qualified medical practitioner" was prohibited from acting as Medical Officer of Health. The Local Government Act, 1888, empowered what is now the Ministry of Health to refuse its sanction to the appointment of a medical officer who did not possess a Diploma of Public Health, in the case of districts with a population exceeding 50,000. The Public Health (London) Act, 1891, Sec. 108, gave the Ministry of Health a similar power to insist upon sanitary inspectors in the metropolis possessing the certificate granted by the Sanitary Inspectors' Examination Board. The Ministry of Health recommends that inspectors outside London should hold the certificate of the Royal Sanitary Institute. The effect of not obtaining the Ministry's sanction to an appointment is to preclude the local authority from obtaining a grant-in-aid of half the official's salary. Cf. *English Public Health Administration*, Bannington, pp. 63-5 *et seq.* Special qualifications for women health visitors are also prescribed by the Health Visitors (London) Order, 1909.

own grades; though at the same time making it reasonably possible for enterprising members of a lower grade to overcome them. In fact, the movement by these vocational associations towards Professional Qualification, accompanied by a keen and vigorous interest in the advancement of professional knowledge, is the most striking characteristic of the Municipal Civil Service voluntary organizations; and this movement is manifested, not by the Service as a single whole, but by separate sections of it. But before we say more upon this subject, it will be well to examine in a little detail the functions of one or two typical examples of these Associations.

Let us start with the Association of Rate Collectors and Assistant Overseers. Its objects are (a) to improve the status of Rate Collectors and Assistant Overseers generally and (b) to hold examinations and grant diplomas to such persons seeking appointments as are able to prove themselves proficient in the technical knowledge of the work necessary for the proper fulfilment of the duties attached to the office. With these objects in view, the Association holds lectures, arranges discussions, has student societies for *viva voce* classes, and gives information to the legislature and the local authorities as to the experience and practice of its members. But above all, the Association is concerned with the enforcement of vocational qualifications for Rate Collectors and allied officials, partly in order to improve their conditions of service and partly in order to increase the efficiency of the grade. There are many causes militating against the Society's fight for efficiency: the old age of some officers in the grade, arising from the lack of a ubiquitous superannuation scheme; an insecure tenure of employment dependent largely on the goodwill of the stream of ever-changing councillors; above all, the existence of "cases where Assistant Overseers have been appointed in large districts without having had the requisite theoretical and practical experience." The remedy for most of these troubles is the imposition of a professional qualification for all members<sup>2</sup> of the grade

<sup>1</sup> *Year-Book of Association of Rate Collectors, etc.*, 1921, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> The Association comprises 1,268 members, all holding appointments as Rate Collectors or Assistant Overseers in England and Wales. Most of them are chief rating officers.

in the Municipal Service; and with the object of securing this the Association prepared an elaborate syllabus and examination scheme for submission<sup>1</sup> to the National Whitley Council for the staffs of local authorities with the Resolution that "After 1/7/1922 all candidates for appointments as Rate Collectors, etc., shall have received experience in the duties, and be technically certificated as evidence of their efficiency." The scheme comprises both theoretical knowledge and practical training, and covers a period of at least three years. The Association conducts its own examinations<sup>2</sup> with the assistance of outside experts, and awards its own certificates.

An organization moulded on somewhat similar lines is the Sanitary Inspectors' Association, which has for its objects the promotion and exchange of knowledge concerning Sanitary Service, the maintenance of the status of Sanitary Inspectors, and the obtaining for them of security of tenure, superannuation and adequate remuneration. With these ends in view, the Association, which has extensive educational activities, appoints an Examination Board to conduct examinations in various parts of the country, and confers certificates and diplomas of proficiency in Sanitary Science.<sup>3</sup> In this respect the Sanitary Inspectors' Association is in a much stronger position than the Association of Rate Collectors; for there is a statutory qualification required of Sanitary Inspectors in the Metropolis; and the Ministry of Health is able to insist on their holding in the London area the certificate issued by the Association, and outside London recommends either that or the one conferred by the Royal Sanitary Institute—a kindred body. But outside London appointments are often made (in spite of the

<sup>1</sup> The scheme was to be submitted through the National Association of Local Government Officers; but the Whitley Council broke down before this could be done.

<sup>2</sup> The subjects for the final examination are (1) Law and Practice relating to Assessment and Rating; (2) Registration of Electors; (3) Miscellaneous Duties of Overseers and their Officers; (4) Valuation; (5) Law of Landlord and Tenant; (6) Elements of Economics; (7) Public Administration; (8) Law of Meetings. The first four are compulsory; any one of the last four may be selected.

<sup>3</sup> The Regulations and Syllabus for the examinations are significant as showing to what an advanced stage the Association has pushed forward the advancement of knowledge in its vocation. The theoretical side of the syllabus alone includes some thirty subjects, varying from the scientific principles of combustion and artificial lighting to the size and characteristics of sound and unsound organs in animals intended for human food.

## 36 FROM PATRONAGE TO PROFICIENCY

Ministry of Health) without insistence upon the certificate, and patronage is by no means unknown. In order to prevent this, the Association, which "takes a strong view as to the undesirability of any person becoming a Sanitary Inspector who has not had previous practical training in the duties of the office," passed the following Resolution at its Conference at Margate in September, 1920:

"That in the opinion of this Conference . . . it is of national importance that there shall be a scheme of training and examination for all entrants to the Sanitary Inspectors' profession under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, and that the examining body consist of equal proportions of representatives nominated by the Ministry of Health and this Association, with a Sanitary Inspector as Chairman."<sup>1</sup>

A further Resolution set forward an elaborate scheme of training, covering a period of four years, in the theory and practice of Sanitary Science. Simultaneously with this attempt to enforce the imposition of qualifications upon practising members, the Sanitary Inspectors' Association has turned to consider the interests of those closely allied to the calling; for the declared policy of the organization is to assist members of the clerical staffs in Sanitary Departments to qualify as Inspectors, instead of being faced with a continuance of what is otherwise almost a blind alley employment.

There are a number of other organizations of a nature similar to those which we have just described: the Institute of Municipal and County Engineers, for example, which exists partly to advance the science and practice of municipal engineering and surveying in all their branches by means of lectures, discussions, classes, etc., and partly to promote the interests of the profession by means of educational activities, the holding of examinations, and the conferring of qualifying certificates. Although it is nominally not permitted by its constitution to work for objects that would be such as to make it a Trade Union, the Institution has drawn up and issued to local authorities Model Regulations for the Employment of Engineers and Surveyors by those bodies. Further, it has devised an interesting plan

<sup>1</sup> *Sanitary Journal*, October, 1920, p. 60. 411 Conference tickets were issued for this Conference.



of classifying engineers into four grades, according to the examinations they have passed and the experience they have obtained; and appointments in the Municipal Service are separated into categories corresponding to these grades. We shall refer to this idea later.

It will be unnecessary to describe the many other organizations of a similar kind,<sup>1</sup> such as the Institute of Water Engineers, the Women Sanitary Inspectors and Health Visitors' Association, or the Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants. But a word must be said concerning the largest and in many ways the most significant of them all—the National Association of Local Government Officers (commonly known as Nalgo).

Nalgo is an Association which has a membership of some 40,000 Municipal officials, all of whom join as direct members. It takes for its direct membership the whole residue of the clerical, administrative and operative classes of the Municipal Service (excluding Corporation workmen and other unskilled manual labourers) which is not already organized in other associations. Thus it is not confined to any one grade of officials, but sweeps from one end of the scale to the other—from a Town Clerk with a salary of two or three thousand a year to an obscure junior clerk earning a few shillings a week. It is concerned, to a large extent, with Trade Union questions of pay, superannuation, conditions of service, etc., but one of its chief activities is the development of a policy of Training and Qualification for all grades. And here, it is clear, Nalgo has had to solve an entirely new problem; for, unlike all the other Professional Associations of local government officials, it has not merely had to draw up a comparatively simple and rigid scheme of qualification for a single homogeneous grade of the service, but has been compelled to devise some plan which

<sup>1</sup> There are also societies that are almost entirely Subject-Associations, such as the County Accountants' Society, which exists primarily for purposes of conference and does not deal directly with the professional qualifications of its members (who are nearly always Chartered or Incorporated Accountants, or members of the Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants); but since the first object of this Society is "to further the technical knowledge of the members by conference, exchange of views, and discussion upon all points incidental to the financial operations of County Councils, and thus to secure improved efficiency of administration," it exercises a close indirect influence upon the qualifications and status of members of the grade; because every increase of efficiency in a branch of administration necessitates a higher general level of efficiency among the officials who conduct it.

could be adapted to the needs of all the scores of different grades to which its members belong.

The scheme which Nalگو has adopted is as follows : A youth desirous of entering the clerical or administrative branches of the Service must show that he possesses " the requisite educational status " by passing the Association's preliminary examination or some other examination of a similar standard such as a University Matriculation, Oxford or Cambridge Higher Local, etc. He then proceeds to sit for the Nalگو Intermediate Examination ; and on passing this he can present himself for the Nalگو Final Examination. At this test there are only two compulsory subjects (Public Administration ; and the Relationship of Master and Servant, as applied to the Local Government Service), and the candidate is permitted to select one or more out of a very large number of optional subjects<sup>1</sup> which cover practically the whole field of Local Government Administration, from Municipal Trading to the Conduct of Elections, from the Public Health Acts to Summary Jurisdiction. He will then be given a certificate which declares him to be qualified in the specific subjects in which he has successfully passed the final examination. He can at any time obtain certificates in additional subjects.

Special regulations have been framed to meet the case of serving officials. The Education Committee appointed by Nalگو has powers to waive the examination test in the case of (a) Heads of Departments and principal assistants whose experience and qualifications satisfy the Committee as to their competence, (b) Officers who can produce evidence of having passed examinations held by other bodies of an equally high standard in the specified subjects ; (c) Persons over thirty-five years of age who have (or had) completed before January, 1922, ten years' service ; and who can satisfy the Education Committee that they were in a sufficiently responsible position to enable them to obtain by experience the standard of knowledge in any subject equal to that required by the syllabus in that subject.

It will be seen that this scheme is very comprehensive and far-reaching. For, in the first place, it enables prac-

<sup>1</sup> For particulars of all these subjects and for details of the whole scheme, see Revised (1920) issue of Prospectus and Syllabus for Nalگو Examinations.

tically every clerical and administrative official who is possessed of adequate knowledge, whether attained by study or as the result of practical experience, to obtain a certificate of qualification in the subjects in which he is proficient; and this should not only give him an advantage over a rival candidate for a situation who is not so equipped, but should also make the path of promotion to a higher grade in the service considerably easier. For energetic and enterprising officers can by obtaining certificates of proficiency, as a result of study, in all the subjects cognate to the work of a higher grade, in that way prove their suitability for at least a trial in the duties of the higher office. In the second place, the scheme attempts to set up a minimum of educational attainment for new recruits to the Municipal Service; for, says the Association "up to the present there has been an entire absence of uniformity as regards the standard of education for entrants into the Service" and "the policy of the Association is to help local authorities in every possible way to secure the maximum amount of efficiency in return for adequate remuneration and proper Service conditions."<sup>1</sup> Nalگو, therefore, appeals to all local authorities to assist them in enforcing the scheme by demanding from those seeking appointments the qualifications referred to in the scheme; while, in order to assist in the work of training candidates for its examinations, the Association has established a Correspondence School, and also intends to approach all education authorities "with the object of instructing teachers to select and prepare specially suitable pupils for entrance to the Local Government Service."<sup>2</sup>

It can be seen from this brief survey how important is the part played by Professional Associations in advancing the standard of knowledge in the various branches of Municipal Administration, and at the same time in imposing recognizable qualifications upon the practising members of the various grades. The vigorous interest taken by these Professional Associations of Municipal Civil Servants in the various branches of their vocation stands out in a striking contrast to the apathy and indifference to the subject-matter of their calling, which

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum issued by Nalگو on Education Qualifications for Junior Entrants into the Local Government Service, March, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

has in the past been manifested by nearly all of the Associations of National Civil Servants. And, as Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb remark, "Whatever may be the reason for professional organization among the brain-working officials of local authorities, we suggest that it has been an almost unmixed good, whilst its fuller recognition would be a further gain."<sup>1</sup> With this verdict it is impossible to disagree.

But, as a matter of fact, the explanation is not hard to seek. The Associations of the National Civil Service have not concerned themselves with the question of protecting the interests of their members by restricting entry to the profession in the only way in which such restriction of admission to the public service would be countenanced on a large scale to-day in this country—namely, by advancing the standards of general education or of technical knowledge—because that task has been placed in the hands of the Civil Service Commission. In the same way we attribute the existence of keen and progressive Associations of Municipal Civil Servants largely to the revolt of municipal officials against the disgraceful system of patronage which is one of the scandals of English local government at the present time; and to their desire, in the face of that patronage and in the absence of any method of recruitment based on officially-controlled qualifying tests, to protect the interests of the profession through their own associations. There is little doubt, indeed, that the desire to abolish patronage and to improve the status of the various grades by eliminating the untrained is the chief motive which has impelled the members of practically all the brain-working grades in the local administration to set up barriers against haphazard entry into their various vocations; to define, delimit and advance, through their corporate associations, the technique of the calling; to arrange for the acquirement of it by approved methods of instruction; to confer certificates and diplomas on those who have received adequate training by these methods; and finally to seek the co-operation of the local authorities in enforcing the imposition of these qualifications on their employees.

This now brings us face to face with what is the most

<sup>1</sup> *New Statesman*, Special Supplement on Professional Associations, Part II, p. 33, April 28th, 1917.

astonishing feature of the whole subject : namely, the entire absence of any collective co-operation in this matter between the various groups of local authorities and the several Professional Associations, despite the fact that the various ranks of local authorities are already organized, for the purposes of conference and combined action, in bodies such as the County Councils' Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations. For in spite of the growing complexity and increasing importance of their work, the local governing bodies have, to their discredit, made no joint effort whatever to consider the part they should take in dealing with the vital question of obtaining and maintaining a flow of efficient and expert labour for their administrative staffs. Whether or not the qualifications set up by an Association are demanded is a question which each local council decides for itself ; and, accordingly, there are large variations in individual and corporate efficiency, not merely between authorities of different rank, but also between those of similar rank and size. Yet as the scale of the unit increases, and as in fact we approach the large County Boroughs, so do we find that the evils and dangers arising from incompetent personnel become so increasingly obvious and capable of measurement, that as a consequence the demands for standard qualifications are more strictly defined and more rigidly insisted upon by the employing Council. But no attempt has yet been made by the local authorities as a whole to enforce throughout the Service any uniformity of qualification for their officials, although collective action is obviously essential if the various standards of qualification are to be maintained ; for without official recognition by the authorities no Professional Association can acquire sufficient power to enforce its qualifying standard uniformly and effectively.

This lack of any common standard among local authorities even of the same rank does not apply only in regard to the qualifications they demand of their personnel, but also in regard to pay, superannuation, hours of work, etc. ; so that the principle of equal pay for approximately equal work does not apply, broadly speaking, to the Municipal Service. In fact, we are often confronted with the gross anomaly that, whereas the poorest and most crowded and insanitary districts require the best men to administer the public health and other ser-

vices, and where, indeed, it is probable that each official is most fully occupied, it is actually the prosperous areas, where the work is less arduous and fundamentally less important, that can afford to pay the highest salaries and which accordingly attract the pick of the service. This occurrence is not of universal application; but it is frequently noticeable among, for example, the Metropolitan Boroughs of London. Indeed, in some ways the competition in regard to staff that exists among the various local authorities *inter se*, and even in certain cases between the local service and the Ministry of Health,<sup>1</sup> is analogous to the competition which existed between Departments of the Central Government under the discredited system of Direct Recruitment; and, after some allowance has been made for the special war conditions under which Direct Recruiting took place, practically all the disadvantages which were seen to accrue thereto can fairly be applied to the method obtaining in the Municipal Service. The unequal remuneration of equal (or not correspondingly unequal) work, leading to discontentment among the less highly paid workers; the absence of any universal standards of qualification or experience; the frequent reliance on personal recommendation, resulting in a relaxation of existing standards; the employment of inefficient and poorly-trained candidates, after discharge by one establishment, at an equal or even higher remuneration by another Department; the "stealing" of officials by one unit from another—all these objections (with the additional evil of patronage) are to some extent applicable to the condition arising from the existing lack of co-ordination among local authorities. That the evil effects show up less obviously than they did in the case of the National Civil Service is due in considerable part to the fact that no comparisons are made between local governing bodies as to their relative efficiency, except in so far as misleading results, such as the amount of the rates, or the number of houses built within a given period, throw light on the subject. But the evils exist all the same, and if a strong Royal Commission was appointed to inquire

<sup>1</sup> Sir A. Newsholme, then Chief Medical Officer to the Local Government Board, gave evidence before the Royal Commission on the Civil Service concerning the difficulty of obtaining good Medical Officers from local authorities for service in what has since become the Ministry of Health. See Q. 22, 905 *et seq.*, of Evidence.

into the staffing of local authorities—a Commission which is badly needed—there is no doubt but that they would be brought to light in the report. It is with a view to their removal that we make the following suggestions.

The great need of the Municipal Civil Service is the introduction of a measure of uniformity in regard to qualifications, remuneration and conditions of service, in so far as this is compatible with the preservation of local autonomy and the progressive reward of special merit among individual officials. Let us deal first with the question of recruitment.

We think that the necessity for expert knowledge on the part of those engaged in the administration of local affairs is so obvious that the case for the imposition of minimum qualifications upon all brain-workers in the Service is absolutely overwhelming, and requires no further advocacy. When, however, we come to consider the manner in which this result can best be secured, certain facts present themselves for consideration. The first of these is that any method of competitive examination would be entirely unsuited to the existing conditions of the Municipal Service. To commence with, it is antipathetic to the historical development of the Service; for the various Associations of Municipal Servants have one and all upheld the traditional attitude of civilian professional bodies in maintaining the assumption that all qualified members of the grade are theoretically equal<sup>1</sup> in knowledge and competency—an assumption which, whether it be good or bad, is essential for the maintenance of professional etiquette or solidarity for Trade Union purposes. Then, again, competitive examination is only feasible for young men who have not passed the “examinable” age: that is, who are at the most not older than, say, twenty-seven years of age; and this alone would rule the method out of court, for Municipal Servants are continually changing their appointments from one authority to another, even up to an advanced age; and in this respect the Municipal Service is entirely unlike the National Civil Service, in which there is but

<sup>1</sup> The classification by certain Associations (e.g., Institute of Municipal and County Engineers) of their members into separate categories, according to experience, etc., does not invalidate this remark. The point is that all the members of each category are assumed in theory to be of equal competence.

one employer for all its branches. But the greatest objection of all lies in the fact that a system of competitive examination, even if confined to candidates on their first entry, would of practical necessity have to be conducted by a single tribunal specially created for that purpose; and this would destroy at a blow the not least important of all the separate rights which together make up the precious sum of Local Autonomy: to wit, the unfettered right of the local employing council to choose for itself, without let or hindrance, the administrative officials who are to carry out its orders. The only other practical alternative is an extension of the system of qualifying examination, and it is this which we shall now consider. We have already seen how unmistakably the Service is of its own accord moving in the direction of standard minimum qualifications for each grade; and any scheme based on that principle would, therefore, not only be acceptable and, indeed, welcome to the Municipal Administration as a whole, but would be enabled to utilize the valuable elements of spontaneous and progressive collective activity which have made the Professional Associations of the local Service so beneficial to the promotion of Public Administration in many of its aspects.

What we suggest is that a number of Joint Committees should be formed, each consisting, in equal numbers, of members representing one Professional Association and members representing the various Associations of Local Authorities<sup>1</sup> with a chairman nominated by the Ministry of Health. Thus, there would be one Committee appertaining to the Institution of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, another relating to the National Association of Local Government Officers, and so forth. Each Committee would then proceed to formulate a scheme of uniform qualifications for the vocation, either by adopting the existing requirements already devised by the Professional Association, or by

<sup>1</sup> A Federation of Local Authorities unfortunately does not at present exist. Such a body is greatly to be desired; and its co-operation would be of inestimable value for the carrying out of the scheme suggested above, or any other of a like nature. If it existed, the representatives of the Federation could either replace or be in addition to the deputies from the separate Associations of Authorities. Cf. the suggestions for federation among local authorities contained in *Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, by S. and B. Webb, pp. 239-43.



modifying and extending them to fit in with a more comprehensive application. This would not mean that there would necessarily be only a single qualifying standard for all members of each grade, even where this at present exists; for although in some of the branches of local administration the standard required is practically the same for the workers in every authority, large and small, from a Rural District Council to a County Borough, in many other branches of work an appointment in a large authority demands a much higher standard of qualification than does a corresponding situation in an authority of lower rank and size. Therefore it would in many cases be advisable to follow the plan adopted by the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers, and distinguish the qualifications required by members of the profession for various categories of appointments<sup>1</sup>: for this would not constitute a departure from the established principle of equality of qualification for all members of the grade—it would merely break up the grade into a small number of sub-grades, in each of which the principle would apply.

Having thus provisionally agreed upon the standard of qualification to be officially recognized in the future, the members representing the Associations of Local Authorities would then submit the schemes for ratification to those bodies, in order that they might be officially adopted and published; the end in view being, of course, to secure a voluntary undertaking from all the local authorities, acting collectively through their Associations, to abide by these schemes and enforce their provisions by insisting upon the standard qualifications from all applicants seeking appointments in the future. Each Joint Committee would appoint an Education Committee to conduct the examinations and organize the training for them; and the qualifying standards would naturally be subject to frequent scrutiny and revision.<sup>2</sup> The rights of serving officials who were unqualified in the present sense of the term would be safeguarded on

<sup>1</sup> For details, see Model Regulations for the Employment of Engineers and Surveyors by Local Government Authorities prepared by the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers and adopted by the Surveyors' Institution.

<sup>2</sup> The example of Nalگو, in approaching the local Education Authorities with a view to co-ordinating the qualifying examinations with the educational system of the nation, should certainly be followed by the Joint Committee.

the lines laid down by Nalگو for similar cases. It is true, of course, that certain isolated appointments could not be dealt with in the way outlined above; for there are in the Municipal Civil Service, as in the National Civil Service, a few situations of an exceptional nature which are not sufficiently numerous or widely distributed for it to be worth while to deal with them in this manner. But the vast majority of posts in the administrative and clerical branches of the Service are "standardizable"; and those grades which have no Professional Association could either be asked to form one, or come under the comprehensive ægis of Nalگو. It may here be mentioned that no definite objections by local authorities to the schemes of qualification put forward by Nalگو and other Associations are either known of or appear to have been stated.<sup>1</sup>

The next suggestion which we have to make arises naturally and almost inevitably out of the former one. It is that the Joint Committees, having agreed upon the standards of qualification for the various categories of appointments, should then proceed to draw up uniform rates of pay and conditions of service applicable to those different classes of situations. No elaborate classification of all the hundreds of ever-changing authorities is needed. All that would be required would be that appointments in the vocation, or in the separate grades of the vocation, would be defined according to the rank or size of the employing Council; and standard rates of pay, etc., determined for all appointments in each category. For some kinds of work the rate would be the same throughout the Service; for others it would depend on whether the employing authority was a Rural or Urban District Council, a Borough or County Council; for others, again, size rather than rank would be the determining factor, and the scale of remuneration would vary with the territorial area, aggregate or density of population, or rateable value of the employing authority. Thus, where the responsibility and importance of the work varied with the unit, the pay of the official performing it would vary proportionately (subject to allowances for local differences in the cost of living) in an equitable and uniform manner; but where the work did not so vary,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the table at the foot of page 31, which shows that several authorities have actually adopted the Nalگو scheme.

then the rate would remain unchanged throughout the Service. This principle is an extension of the tentative recommendations put forward by the Association of Rate Collectors and Assistant Overseers and the Institution of Municipal and County Engineers in respect of their members. It could be worked out and enforced by the same method as that suggested above in regard to recruitment. The disintegration of the National Whitley Council for the Staffs of Local Authorities on a question of wage agreement does not mean that the problems above-mentioned can be shelved, but rather that they are more fundamental and pressing for solution than was previously supposed.

The rates of pay laid down for any appointment should not be a single fixed figure, but should comprise a maximum and a minimum limit, as in the National Civil Service; so that there would be no check to the incentive at present offered by the prospect of additional remuneration for meritorious work. In the event of the maximum figure being below that actually paid to certain serving officials, its application would only take effect when a vacancy occurred. Promotion would take place either within the ranks of an authority, or from a smaller authority to a larger one. That is to say, it would operate as at present, with the exception that it would not be possible for an official to get a higher salary by transferring his services from one authority to another more prosperous one of the same, or even smaller size, unless the position offered harder or more responsible work.

We do not wish to appear over-sanguine in summarizing the advantages that might be expected to result from the adoption of these proposals. But it is surely difficult to deny that they would lead to the elimination of patronage where it now flourishes; to the enforcement of minimum standards of technical knowledge and education, and consequently to an increase in the general efficiency of the Municipal Administration; to the encouragement, by a fuller recognition, of the valuable work performed by the various Professional Associations in furthering the technique of the vocation; to a raising, as a result of that recognition, of the status of the several sections of the Service, and therefore of the Service as a whole; to the removal of the element of haphazard competition in regard to the recruitment of

personnel among the local authorities (analogous to Direct Recruiting by Departments of State) with all the evils attendant thereto; to the establishment throughout the Service of the equitable principle of equal pay for equal work, subject to additional stated increments for efficient and industrious service, with a consequent improvement in the welfare of each grade as a whole; to the attainment, by means of the Joint Committee, of a valuable degree of impartiality in regard to the imposition of qualifying tests, involving neither the destruction of the spontaneous interest manifested by the Service in the advancement of professional knowledge, nor the forfeiture by the employing Councils of their well-nigh complete independence as regards the final selection of a candidate, nor the abandonment by them of their power of effective control over any action by the Professional Associations which might be inimical to those sovereign interests of the nation at large which it should be the duty of the Councils ever to safeguard.

We venture to suggest that proposals which seriously claim the furtherance of the best interests of the Public Service to this extent are at any rate worthy of consideration. And we therefore ask for that consideration of them by those who know the value of the work done by the Municipal Civil Service, and admire the public-spirited manner in which it is performed.

# THE FABIAN SOCIETY

25, TOTHILL STREET, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W. 1.

Those willing to join the Labour Party, or desirous of obtaining information about its Programme and Principles, are invited to communicate with the Secretary of the Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society has been, from the outset, a constituent body of the Labour Party; and membership of the Society carries with it full membership of the Labour Party, eligibility for nomination to all Conferences and Offices, and qualification for Labour Party candidatures for Parliament and Local Authorities, without obligation to belong to any other organization.

The Society welcomes as members any persons, men or women, wherever resident, who subscribe to its Basis (set forth below), and who will co-operate in its work according to their opportunities.

## BASIS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

(TO BE SIGNED BY ALL MEMBERS.)

(Adopted May 23rd, 1919.)

The Fabian Society consists of Socialists.

It therefore aims at the reorganization of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general benefit. In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in land, with equitable consideration of established expectations, and due provision as to the tenure of the home and the homestead; for the transfer to the community, by constitutional methods, of all such industries as can be conducted socially; and for the establishment, as the governing consideration in the regulation of production, distribution and service, of the common good instead of private profit.

The Society is a constituent of the Labour Party and of the International Socialist Congress; but it takes part freely in all constitutional movements, social, economic and political, which can be guided towards its own objects. Its direct business is (a) the propaganda of Socialism in its application to current problems; (b) investigation and discovery in social, industrial, political and economic relations; (c) the working out of Socialist principles in legislation and administrative reconstruction; (d) the publication of the results of its investigations and their practical lessons.

The Society, believing in equal citizenship of men and women in the fullest sense, is open to persons irrespective of sex, race or creed, who commit themselves to its aims and purposes as stated above, and undertake to promote its work.

The Society includes:—

- I. Members, who must sign the Basis and be elected by the Committee. Their subscriptions are not fixed; each is expected to subscribe annually according to his means. They control the Society through the Executive Committee (elected annually by ballot through a postal vote), and at its annual and other business meetings.
- II. Associates, who sign a form expressing only general sympathy with the objects of the Society and pay not less than 10s. a year. They can attend all except the executive members' meetings, but have no control over the Society and its policy.
- III. Subscribers, who must pay at least 5s. a year, and who can attend the Society's Ordinary Lectures.

The monthly paper, *Fabian News*, and the Tracts from time to time published in the well-known Fabian Series, are posted to all these classes. There are convenient Common Rooms, where light refreshments can be obtained, with an extensive library for the free use of members only.

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